

HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

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“...a better class of women...”: The Training and Formation of Medical Technologists, 1906-1965

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In the early twentieth century, discoveries in medical science led to the development of routine diagnostic laboratory procedures. Pathologists, the physicians who concerned themselves most with this aspect of the science, performed these tests themselves. As the number of procedures grew, the physician turned over testing duties to a new category of workers, the laboratory technicians,

The need for competent workers led to established training programs from 1919 to the 1930s. Frequently, leaders in pathology preferred females for laboratory work. Historians of clinical laboratory science attribute the selection of women to the fact that physicians wished for laboratory workers who would not overstep the line of clinical autonomy nor would ask for large salaries. This explanation does not leave room for other reasons for the preponderance of women in the clinical laboratory.

In 1921, R.B.H. Gradwohl, M.D., appealed for recruitment of “a better class of women” to train for the task. This paper explores the paths of women to early diagnostic laboratories and offers other reasons for their majority status in the profession. Currently, the profession remains at about 75% female.

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